

What is Claimed:

1. A computer-implemented method of characterizing attributes of a candidate, in data that is independent of language, comprising:
 - providing an interface to enable a user to describe attributes by selecting from an hierarchical structure;
 - associating a numeric code with each attribute; and
 - arranging the numeric code for each attribute selected by the user in an attributes profile, and repeating the above steps for other candidates.
2. The method of claim 1, wherein the attributes include skill, know-how, properties, characteristics, and/or services.
3. The method of claim 1, wherein the interface enables the user to list credentials.
4. The method of claim 1, wherein hierarchical structure is presented as a set of linked menus or lineage strings.
5. The method of claim 3, further comprising providing an interface to enable a validating party to access the candidate's credentials, and recording the validating party's assessment of the credentials.
6. A computer-implemented method of characterizing a searcher's requirements in terms of the candidate's attributes, comprising:
 - providing an interface to enable the searcher to select and specify the importance of each attribute;
 - associating a numeric code with each attribute; and
 - recording the numeric code and associated importance for each attribute selected by the searcher, building a requirements profile.

7. A system, comprising:

- (a) a server providing a user interface for entering candidates' attributes profiles;
- (b) a server providing a user interface for entering a searcher's requirements profile, including the importance of each requirement;
- (c) a coding module to associate a numeric code with each attribute and requirement;
- (d) numeric codes representing the candidates' attributes profiles;
- (e) numeric codes representing the searcher's requirements profile;
- (f) a data query engine to compare the searcher's requirements profile against the candidates' attributes profiles and to provide a list of candidates that have attributes that relate to the searcher's requirements; and
- (g) a ranking module to rank the list of candidates based on the degree of match between each candidate's attributes profile and the searcher's requirements profile.

8. The system of claim 7, further comprising:

- a server providing an interface to enable candidates to enter lists of credentials;
- a credentials data structure containing the lists of credentials; and
- a server providing an interface to enable a validator to access and review candidates' lists of credentials and submit a review of the lists of credentials into the credentials data structure.

9. The system of claim 7, wherein the degree of match is determined by the weight of each requirement and the position of the requirement relative to the nearest matching attribute in a hierarchy of attributes.

10. The system of claim 7, wherein the structure of the numeric codes defines a hierarchy of related attributes and/or requirements, and their relationship is represented by the assigned relevance values to each position in the hierarchy.

11. A computer-implemented method of characterizing a planner's requirements in terms of the candidate's attributes, in data that is independent of language, comprising:

- providing an interface to enable the planner to describe their requirements by selecting from an hierarchical structure and specify the importance of each requirement;
- associating a numeric code with each requirement; and

arranging the numeric code for each requirement and associated importance for each requirement selected by the planner in a requirements profile, and repeating the above steps for other planners.

12. The method of claim 11, wherein the planner's requirements include skill, know-how, properties, characteristics, and/or services.

13. The method of claim 11, wherein the interface enables the planner to list credentials.

14. The method of claim 13, further comprising:

providing an interface to enable a validating party to access the credentials, and recording the validating party's assessment of the credentials.

15. A computer-implemented method of characterizing a searcher's attributes, comprising:

providing an interface to enable the searcher to select each attribute;

associating a numeric code with each attribute; and

recording the numeric code for each attribute selected by the searcher, building an attributes profile.

16. A system, comprising:

(a) a server providing a user interface for entering planners' requirements profiles including the importance of each requirement;

(b) a server providing a user interface for entering a searcher's attributes profile;

(c) a coding module to associate a numeric code with each attribute and requirement;

(d) numeric codes representing the planners' requirements profiles;

(e) numeric codes representing the searcher's attributes profile;

(f) a data query engine to compare the searcher's attributes profile against each planner's requirements profile and to provide a list of planners that have requirements that relate to the searcher's attributes; and

(g) a ranking module to rank the list of planners based on the degree of match between each planner's requirements profile and the searcher's attributes profile.

17. The system of claim 16, further comprising:

- a server providing an interface to enable the planners to enter lists of credentials;

- a credentials data structure containing the lists of credentials;

- a server providing an interface to enable a validator to access and review the planners' lists of credentials and submit a review of the lists of credentials into the credentials data structure.

18. The system of claim 16, wherein the degree of match is determined by the weight of each requirement and the position of the requirement relative to the nearest matching attribute in a hierarchy of attributes.

19. The system of claim 16, wherein the structure of the numeric codes defines a hierarchy of related attributes and/or requirements, and their relationship is represented by the assigned relevance values to each position in the hierarchy.

20. The system of claim 16, wherein the hierarchical structure conveys the relationship between attributes and a requirement.